

UNION COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

1995

- 1st Draft -

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U.S. Forest Service Economic Recovery Program Grant**

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UNION COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

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This plan was prepared under a grant from the United States Forest Service Economic Recovery Program. The statements, findings, conclusions and recommendations in this plan are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Forest Service.

In 1990, Union County developed a strategic plan which established the following three goals:

- **foster a sense of community in Union County,**
- **coordinate services and service delivery among county departments and between the county and cities,**
- **identify and train leaders at all levels of government, county and municipal.**

The following objectives were designed to help the County achieve its stated goals.

- **Hold County Commission/Town Hall Meetings in La Grande and Outlying Communities.**
- **Facilitate the Improvement of Air Transportation**
- **Develop a Communications Plan**
- **Monitor the Distribution of County Services**
- **Undertake Joint Projects With the Cities**
- **Publish a Map and Annual Calendar of County Recreational Opportunities**
- **Promote an Annual Recreational Event**
- **Encourage the Choice of Place Names to Reflect a Sense of the Broader Community**
- **Facilitate Collaboration, Coordination and Cooperation Among Cities, State and Federal Agencies, and Eastern Oregon State College**
- **Promote Leadership Training**

- Continue to Participate in Natural Resource Councils and Advisory Boards that Address Water and Forest Related Issues, and, When Necessary, Form Similar New Bodies

It is the goal of the Union County Board of Commissioners to build on their previous strategic plan by including more input from the eight cities within the county. The continued building of a county-wide strategic plan will foster county-wide planning, coordination of services and meeting present and future needs. Future stable funding sources must be identified in order to allow this plan to continue on its present course.

Introduction

On September 14, 1994, the U.S. Forest Service approved a grant award to the Union County Board of Commissioners to develop a Union County Strategic Action Plan as part of the Forest Service Economic Recovery Program. This plan will allow the County to build capacity and cooperative relationships for economic activity in the County. As stated in a recent Economic Development Administration document focusing on community planning: "Many communities continue to *react to* economic development situations rather than *plan for* economic opportunity. A local business might close, leaving an empty building or vacant lot which needs to be redeveloped; a large plot of land might be available for industrial development; or a manufacturing company might come to town looking for low-cost financing to expand its operations. In response to these situations, the community often jumps for an economic development project without adequate attention to the community's economic needs or development goals.

In order to move away from this type of reaction, planning must take place. This can be achieved by a strategic planning process and obtaining a thorough understanding of:

- the needs of the population;
- strengths and weaknesses of its existing industrial structure and local market conditions; and
- strengths and weaknesses of its existing economic resource base, including the education and training system, physical infrastructure, the financial base, and local institutional capacity.

The strategic planning process involves three specific steps:

- Understand local needs and set goals;
- Choose economic development strategies; and
- Identify economic development projects.

Union County has chosen to take a Pro-Active stance rather than a Re-Active stance. The following document is a culmination of many documents and plans from the previous years to the current. An example of current data available is from the planning process that the City of Elgin and the City of Union recently completed. These cities spent well over a year working the Rural Development Initiatives to organize their communities and plan for the future. Their existing plans have been incorporated into this document.

The process that was chosen to put this document together involved Union County contracting with the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD) to analyze the information available and write a draft plan. The Union County Overall Economic Development Program Committee met with Union County and the staff of NEOEDD to advise on the process and give initial input. The general consensus was to avoid lengthy planning sessions and utilize information already available. Copies of the draft plan were forwarded to the City Councils and their staff in Union County. A time was scheduled to meet with each City Council to review the plan and receive feedback. It was the intent for each city to establish their goals and how Union County can help them achieve their goals. Strategies will be developed and projects identified. Service and civic organizations will also be involved for additional input.

The Union County Overall Economic Program Committee will be the final step in the process by prioritizing projects for the Union County Board of Commissioners.

It is the goal of Union County to have a working document approved and in force by May of 1995.

UNION COUNTY

History

Union County is located in the heart of Northeast Oregon, nestled among the Blue and Wallowa Mountain ranges. The Native American peoples had a name for the Grande Ronde Valley in Union County and called it Cop Copi, "place where the cottonwoods grow." Each spring when the pass-blocking snows had melted, men, women and children of many tribes followed the ancient trails to Cop Copi. It was a happy land where, if old legends are true, tribespeople of the Nez Perce, Walla Walla, Cayuse, Umatilla, and Shoshone worked and played together in peace. Therefore, the Grande Ronde Valley was referred to as the "Valley of Peace."

Among the earliest records of white Americans in the Grande Ronde Valley is the story of a horse and dog-meat banquet on New Year's Day, 1812. On the last day of 1811, the Wilson Price Hunt expedition, exploring a route from St. Louis to John Jacob Astor's trading post at the mouth of the Columbia, stumbled into the Grande Ronde Valley. They were exhausted, close to starvation and not sure they would survive to leave again. To their great surprise and delight, the explorers found near the mouth of Pyle's Canyon six lodges of a small band of hospitable indians - Shoshones, who were willing to trade and butcher a fat pony and some prime roasting puppies to feed the hungry men. Refreshed by the feast, supplied with food and fresh mounts, the Hunt party continued on to the Columbia River, and then down river to Astoria. Within a few decades, the trail marked by Wilson Price Hunt would become the great emigrant road, the Oregon Trail, from Independence, Missouri, to the Valley of the Willamette.

Over the next sixty years, particularly between 1840 and 1870, more than 300,000 westering emigrants passed through the Grande Ronde Valley. Many camped in the Grande Ronde Valley to refresh themselves and prepare for the wagon-breaking trek across the Blues. It was in 1861 that the first permanent settlers arrived and by early 1862, the population had grown to 35, and the first home had been built in Brown's Town, soon to become La Grande.

Oregon was admitted to the Union as the 33rd state in 1859. The whole of Eastern Oregon from the ridge of the Cascades to the Snake River was designated as Wasco County. By 1862, population growth and the opening of gold mines in the Baker City-Auburn area called for a larger measure of local government in eastern Oregon. In response to local needs, the state legislature detached a large section of the giant county and named it Baker. It also contained present-day Union and Wallowa counties. Union County was formed in 1864 and twenty-three years later, in 1887, Wallowa County was created from its eastern region.

Most of the population and industry of Union County is located in the Grande Ronde Valley as well as six of the county's eight municipalities - Cove, Imbler, Island City, Summerville, Union and La Grande - the county seat and commercial center. The fertile valley is covered with the rich silt of an old lake bed which provides a good base for farming and grazing. Over 65% of Union County's 24,000 population dwell in the Valley. The City of Elgin lies to the North of Indian Valley, also an ancient lake bed; North Powder, the county's southernmost community, is located at the edge of the sagebrush uplands that border Baker County.

All seven outlying cities are within a half hour's drive of La Grande; none is more than 45 minutes at most away from its farthest sister city. Co-location and the fact that all eight communities are essentially rural in culture and outlook with a common interest in, if not dependence upon, the agricultural and timber industries tends to weld them into a single economic and social unit.

Average precipitation is 19 inches and average snowfall is 31 inches. High and low for January are 38 and 23.7 F., while July averages a high of 87 and a low of 53.3F. The Grande Ronde Valley has four distinctly different seasons.

The Grande Ronde River flows through this valley, which is a diamond-shaped fertile plan 20 miles long and 12 miles wide. Mount Emily (6110 ft.) dominates the valley to the northwest and Mount Fanny (7153 ft.) to the northeast. Both mountain ranges are heavily timbered. Adventures abound throughout Union County in backpacking, hiking, fishing, camping, mushrooming, huckleberry picking, bird watching, hunting, skiing and snowmobiling.

Union County encompasses 2,038 square miles, has a population density of 11.8 person per square mile, and a 1992 assessed value of \$624.6 million. The geography of the county is primarily mountains and valleys. Union County border Umatilla and Grant counties to the west, Baker County to the south, and Wallowa County to the east.

Population

Union County, which experienced 6.5% grown in its population during the 1980's has seen a commensurate increase during the 1990's of 2.97%. This change is 4% behind the state average for the same period of time. Union County's population in 1980 was 23,921 and decreased to 23,600 in 1990. Since 1992, the population has remained steady at 24,000.

Population

	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>
Union County	23,921	23,600	24,000	24,000	24,300	24,500

*Source: Center for Population Research and Census, Portland State University

Percent Change in Population

AREA	1980-1990 % Change	1990-1993 % Change	Net % 1990- 1993 Migration
OREGON	10.2%	6.88%	70%
UNION COUNTY	6.5%	2.97%	50%

*Source: Center for Population Research and Census, Portland State University

Population Estimates in Union County - 1992

UNION COUNTY	24,000
Cove	545
Elgin	1,600
Imbler	300
Island City	770
La Grande	11,890
North Powder	460
Summerville	145
Union	1,880
Unincorporated	6,410

*Source: Center for Population Research and Census, Portland State University

Per Capita Income

Per capita income is an estimate of an area's total personal income which consists of wages, rents, dividends, interest income, and all other money income divided by the area's total population.

Per Capita Personal Income

AREA	1982	1986	1990	1991
U.S.	\$11,584	\$14,907	\$18,668	\$19,169
OREGON	\$10,651	\$13,541	\$17,024	\$17,554
UNION COUNTY	\$9,267	\$12,107	\$14,456	\$14,807

*Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce

Union County has participated in the Regional Strategies process which was established in 1987. Each biennium represents a "round" of Regional Strategies funding and since job creation is a driving force behind the process, family wage rates were established as a measuring tool.

Family Wage Job Income Standards

1987-1989	1989-1991	1991-1993	1993-1995
Round I	Round II	Round III	Round IV

Union County	\$16,774	\$16,971	\$17,777	\$19,925
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*Source: Oregon Economic Development Department, using Oregon Employment Division Average Annual Covered Payroll Statistics

Economy

Union County's economy is diversified, but revolves around natural resource based industries such as timber and agriculture. A major contributor to Union County's economy is its largest employer - government representing local (city and county), state and federal offices. In order to grow in our resource industries, added value to the product such as expansion of the wood products sector into secondary wood product manufacturing, or value-add processing in agriculture is beginning to increase the economic output of the area. Tourism and the retail sector has also increased in importance as well as the continued growth in service industries.

Union County wage and salary employment tallied 8,190 in 1979. The severe recession of the early 1980's took its toll, with Union County's payroll employment plunging to 7,580 by 1982, although jobs snapped back rather quickly in the community in 1983.

After a couple of years of going nowhere, Union County saw five consecutive years of employment grown from 1986 to 1990. The payroll employment level of 9,020 for 1990 stands as Union County's best on record. Two hundred wage and salary jobs were lost in 1991, and only 90 were recovered in 1992. It is possible that the job counts in Union County will rise again in 1993, possible exceeding 1990's record level.

Union County has smaller less diverse job markets and this tends to limit opportunities for job seekers, meaning it often takes longer for the unemployed to find job openings which adequately match their skills or interests, especially compared with well diversified metropolitan areas.

Unemployment Rate

AREA	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Union County	7.8%	7.5%	6.8%	7.0%	8.5%	7.9%
State of Oregon	5.8%	5.7%	5.5%	6.0%	7.5%	7.2%

Source: Oregon Employment Division

**1993 Oregon Covered Employment and Payroll
by Industry**

Industry Description	Employees	Total Payroll
Agriculture/Forestry/Fish	180	\$2,528,516
Construction	245	\$5,576,031
Manufacturing & Timber	1,499	\$43,752,283
Transportation/Communication/ Utilities	279	\$6,976,091
Wholesale Trade	416	\$8,709,622
Retail Trade	1,842	\$20,338,575
Financial Institutions and Real Estate	263	\$4,128,926
Services	1,575	\$24,804,420
Nonclassifiable	24	\$619,134
Government	1,182	\$23,798,530
TOTAL - ALL INDUSTRIES	8,527	\$170,677,862

Forest Products

The forest products industry is a major high wage employer. It previously paid \$43,000,000 into Union County's payroll which equates to nearly 20% of the county's total payroll. In addition, to normal harvesting in Union County, there is also substantial primary production within the county. Most of this primary production takes place at the Boise Cascade Mills in La Grande and Elgin. These plants include a sawmill, studmill, particleboard plant and plywood plant.

However, threats exist that may hinder the future stability of the forest products industry. This includes the availability of timber caused by environmental legislation against the Wallowa-Whitman Forest. Regulations that impact the

forest products industry limit the supply of wood available for secondary production, and makes producers more reliant on their private timber holdings. Another threat is the health of the forest which is poor due to insect infestation, soil compaction, and drought. This poor health has opened the door to the possibility of a catastrophic fire.

These threats are currently being addressed. Small woodland owners and large private owners are managing their property wisely by employing silviculture and other natural resource management techniques. In addition, the Blue Mountain Natural Resource Institute is providing resources and expertise for the improvement of land management.

Once the current regulation problems that exist are resolved, several opportunities will exist for the forest products industry. Union County, through eco-system management programs could provide a trained workforce. In addition, the county could position itself to take advantage of high growth secondary processing such as factory built housing, do-it-yourself and ready to assemble products, cutstock, cabinets, and high end specialty products.

UNION COUNTY TIMBER HARVEST - Thousands of Board Feet

LAND OWNERSHIP	1980	1990	1992
FOREST INDUSTRY	73,900	37,133	51,307
OTHER (PRIVATE)	16,210	17,904	43,296
FEDERAL LAND	60,345	53,457	48,946
TOTAL	150,455	108,584	143,549

*Source: Oregon Department of Forestry

Agriculture

Agriculture is also one of the major industries within Union County. Union County farms grossed \$44,687,000 in 1993. That is a \$10,000,000 increase from 1991. There is a diversity of products being produced within Union County which include: grains, hay and forage, grass and legume seeds, potatoes, farm forestry, tree fruits and nuts, vegetables, cattle and calves, hogs, sheep, dairy products, chicken eggs, livestock and poultry.

The agriculture sector was identified as a key industry because of the quantity and diversity of agricultural production in Union County, and because the skills needed for agriculture production are readily available.

Even though an agricultural focus has its benefits, several difficulties exist with maintaining an agricultural focus. The future of world agricultural markets will become increasingly competitive because of the limited growth expectations for agricultural markets and increased supply from most countries around the world. Union County has relatively short growing seasons and is heavily dependent upon irrigation which could cause difficulty when trying to be competitive. Primary production takes place in Union County at this time, but very little secondary processing occurs. The value of a product is added on during secondary processing and Union County could look at secondary processing as a benefit from an agricultural focus. The main factors in determining competitiveness in food processing are availability of sufficient product, access to markets, and environmental compliance costs.

Several opportunities exist which will allow the county to gain more value from its primary production. These include the possibility of production of non-traditional vegetables, specialty fruit orchards, low fat beef, hogs, poultry, specialty cheeses, canola oil, wheat and flower mixes, fruit and vegetable dehydration.

AGRICULTURE STATISTICS - UNION COUNTY

UNION COUNTY	1980	1990
Agriculture Employment	953	874
Gross Agriculture Income (in thousands of dollars)	\$30,108	\$38,091

*Source: Oregon State University - Economic Information Office

UNION COUNTY	1980	1993
Gross Farm Sales - All Livestock and Products (Acres)	8,158	7,347
Harvested Acreage - Total Crops (Acres)	107,490	95,560
Harvested Acreage - Grains (Acres)	61,600	42,100
Harvested Acreage - Hays & Silage (Acres)	31,000	37,650
Harvested Acreage - Field Crops (Acres)	3,130	6,620
Harvested Acreage - All Vegetable Crops (Acres)	1,480	1,200
Harvested Acreage - Tree Fruits, Nuts, Small Fruit and Berries (Acres)	720	850

*Source: Oregon State University - Economic Information Office

Government

This is the largest sector of Union County's economy. Government includes employees at the federal, state and local levels. The largest federal agency in the area is the U.S. Forest Service. The state government presence involves a wide assortment of agencies, but the big contributor to job counts is Eastern Oregon State College. Even students who work on campus are counted as state employees, so this institution accounts for several hundred positions.

Listed below is an example of the many offices and departments of different levels of government located in Union County. This employment sector represented 37% of all payroll in Union County in 1992 and 31% of all payroll in 1993. (Student workers at EOSC are not included in the 1993 data) Currently, for 1994 government is responsible for 27% of all nonfarm jobs in Union County (student workers at EOSC are included in the 1994 data).

*Please note, the data for 1993 and 1994 are still subject to revision.

1993 Oregon Covered Employment and Payroll GOVERNMENT

<u>Union County</u>	<u>Number of Employees</u>	<u>Total Payroll</u>
Local Government	1,182	\$23,798,530
State Government	745	\$21,348,023
Federal Government	278	\$ 8,097,711
TOTAL GOVERNMENT	2,205	\$53,244,264

*Source: Department of Employment

Federal Government

Department of Agriculture

- Farm Service Agency

- Forest Service

- Forest & Range Lab

- Blue Mountains National Resource Institute

- Grande Ronde Model Watershed

- Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

 - La Grande Ranger District

 - La Grande Fire Control

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Army Department - Recruiting Office

Farmers Home Administration

Health & Human Services Department - Social Security Administration

Interior Department - Bonneville Power Administration

Marine Corp - Recruiting Office

National Guard - La Grande Armory

United State Postal Service

State Government

Adult and Family Services

Childrens Services Division

Department of Economic Development

Employment Division

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Department of Transportation

Parks Division

Department of Motor Vehicles

Eastern Oregon State College

Oregon State University

Public Utilities Commissioner

State Police

Union County State Courts

- District

- Circuit

Union County - Government

Administration
Airport
Assessor
County Clerk
Community Corrections
County Commissioners
District Attorney
Educational Service District
Fairgrounds
County Jail
Juvenile Court Services
Planning Commission
Public Works/Road Department
Sheriff's Office
Treasurers & Tax

City Government

Each city in Union County has its own established form of government. La Grande, being the largest city in the county has approximately 120 employees. The cities in the smaller communities have smaller staffs to accomplish the necessary functions but tend to rely more heavily on an "involved community" of volunteers. Examples are the Community Response Teams (CRT) of the Cities of Elgin and Union.

Wholesale, Retail and Service

The La Grande-Island City area is one of Eastern Oregon's largest wholesale and retail trade centers, which represents a major element of the county's economy. Wholesale and retail trade has recently become a leading local growth industry after many years of up and down performance. La Grande is the traditional commercial center of Union County and the scene of excitement and growth. Shopping in the smaller communities of Union County offer a unique experience for a visitor or resident.

Retail Sales (in Thousands of Dollars)

	1981	1986	1990	1991	1992
Union County	101,277	114,766	130,832	135,782	147,995

*Source: Sales and Marketing Management Magazine

The service industries account for a large share of the salary base in Union County. This includes a wide variety of health service, nursing and care facilities, regional tourism and local recreational activities.

Number of Business Establishments

	1989	1990	1991	%Change 1990-1991
Union County	662	658	582	(14.4%)

*Source: County Business Patterns

Medical Community

Union County is blessed with one of the top 100 hospitals accounting to the HCIA Inc/Mercer Management survey. Grande Ronde Hospital employs 390 people that provide the following services:

- Ambulatory SurgiCenter
- Transitional Care Unit
- ICU/CCU Unit
- Medical/Surgical Unit
- 24 Hour Emergency Room
- Diagnostic Services
- Regional Laboratory
- Family Birthing Center
- Restorative Therapy
- Surgical and Other Related Services

Grande Ronde Hospital has focused more positively as a "regional" medical center serving the basic as well as specialized needs of the residents of Union County and the surrounding counties. Its financial position continues to be favorable and during each of the past five years, the hospital's financial position has remained in the upper quartile of all hospitals nationwide, and for the five year time frame from 1990 through 1994, Grande Ronde Hospital was one of Oregon's most profitable hospital.

Over the past three fiscal years ending April 30, 1994, Grande Ronde Hospital purchased \$4,594,384 in equipment and spent \$1,769,973 on the physical facility.

The Grande Ronde Hospital Foundation is stepping up activity to provide increased future support that will address identified needs as a result of health care reform.

Grande Ronde Hospital has 47 active and associate physicians on the medical staff representing 17 specialties. For a population base of 24,000, Union County is fortunate to have this level of expertise available.

Grande Ronde Hospital - Utilization (FY 94)

Discharges	2,013
Births	361
Outpatients	29,722
Patient Days	6,731
Emergencies	10,407
Ambulance Transports - Ground	1,104
Surgeries	2,149

Union County is also served by clinics in both the City of Union and the City of Elgin. Union is working with the Oregon Health Sciences University to maintain a clinic to serve the needs of its residents and Elgin has a satellite facility that is supported by Grande Ronde Hospital.

Transportation

Union County is served by major highways and rail transportation. Interstate 84, a major four-lane limited access highway runs east/west as a major link from the West Coast to eastern population centers. Many highways link the smaller communities within the county and connect with the rest of Northeast Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

Union Pacific Railroad's east/west line passes through Union County. Rail service to or from regional and transcontinental destinations is available. Union Pacific Railroad plays a big part in serving the transportation needs of Union County. Products from Union County move to markets via Union Pacific Railroad.

Air transportation is limited in Union County and is primarily business and recreational. Union County recently upgraded their airport by adding runway and taxiway improvements. Union County has a successful industrial park and recently approve an expansion to further light industrial growth.

Infrastructure & Industrial Parks

Union County possesses an adequate infrastructure for the short term, however, in the long run, infrastructure focus will be on the development of telecommunications, transportation, and maintaining current service capacity for the expected increase in population.

Housing

Perhaps the most pressing current matter in Union County is the lack and cost of housing available. Union County lacks rental capacity and the vacancy rate for rental housing is 0% to 1%. In addition, the cost for rent is high considering the location and wages available. The cost of housing, property, and construction is quite high. The average cost for a new home in Union County is nearly \$90,000. Therefore, many new home buyers are looking into manufactured or mobile homes.

Water Supply

The water supply in Union County is mostly dependent upon sub-surface sources, however, the water that is drawn from surface sources is highly dependent upon winter snow fall. If snow fall in the mountains is inadequate, then the county usually suffers from drought conditions for the remainder of the year. This is an issue that is constantly addressed.

Financial Services

There are four commercial banks serving Union County. These include First Interstate Bank, US National Bank, Western Bank and Bank of America. US National Bank has a satellite facility in the City of Elgin. Pioneer Federal Bank, a state bank charter has two branches in La Grande and serves the county as well. The Baker-Union-Wallowa Credit Union is also located in La Grande and requires a membership process. These lenders provide business as well as personal banking services.

Financial services for businesses are also provided through other organizations. The Oregon Economic Development Department has five different funding programs. These include the Oregon Business Development Fund, Oregon Entrepreneurial Development Loan Fund, Oregon Credit Enhancement Fund, Oregon Capital Access Program and Oregon Industrial Revenue Bond Program. The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD) has four different funding programs that businesses in Union County can access. These include the NEOEDD Revolving Loan Fund, the NEOEDD Intermediary Re-Lending Program, SBA 504 Loan Guarantee Program, and the SBA 7(a) Loan Guarantee Program. NEOEDD also provides grant writing services and staff the Regional Strategy program funded by state lottery dollars. Union County Economic Development Corporation (UCEDC) provides technical assistance to Union County businesses, industrial/business recruitment projects, and prepares Enterprise Zone applications.

Financing capital has been a concern for all businesses that are looking into expansions as well as new start-ups. With these government organizations and commercial lenders in place to serve Union County, accessing the necessary capital has become easier.

Industrial Parks

The three industrial parks in Union County are the Union County Light Industrial Park located at the airport, Baum Industrial Park located on Highway 82 outside of Island City, and Geothermal Industrial Park located out past Hot Lake on Highway 203.

The Union County Light Industrial Park, located at the La Grande-Union County Airport was a joint venture between the Economic Development Administration and Union County. The park is zoned light industrial and a ready-to-develop 42 acre site with 170 acres available for future expansion. The site is served by a 16" water line and an 8" sanitary sewer line. The Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative provides electrical service, and General Telephone provides digital telecommunications service with teleconference capabilities. This sight is accessible by interstate, highway and air. The first phase of the Industrial Park has been so successful in obtaining tenants and creating jobs, that Union County is working on Phase II.

The Baum Industrial Park has 138 acres of undeveloped industrial land and is zoned heavy industrial. It is divided into lots ranging from 10 to 20 acres. Water utility borders the northern boundary with an 18" main line along the railroad tracks. It has an excess capacity of 8 million gallons a day with a storage capacity of 11.5 million gallons. Sanitary sewer is on site with an 8" line. Capacity is 33 million gallons and will be able to handle food process and/or industrial process waste. Electrical, natural gas, and telephone are available.

The Geothermal Industrial Park is facing a questionable future due to the fluctuations in water temperature that was recently discovered. The site is an undeveloped 37-acre parcel located 6 miles southeast of Interstate 84, and adjacent to Oregon State Highway 203 and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Zoned heavy industrial, the parcel is suitable for manufacturing, processing, or storage activity. Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative and General Telephone service lines are

adjacent to the property.

Education

Preschoolers, school-age children and adults are all provided with outstanding opportunities for academic achievement in Union County. High standards are maintained throughout Union County schools and high school SAT test scores remain higher than state and national averages. Enrichment programs, music, theater, speech, and sports programs for boys and girls are an integral part of the county's public schools. Unfortunately with the passage of Measure 5 in 1990, these programs are slowly being phased out. Communities within Union County continually look for other sources of funding to keep programs like these in their individual schools.

The Education Service District (ESD) supports all schools in the county with special programs for handicapped and disabled children from birth to 21 years of age. The ESD also offers coordination of general and vocational curricula, and alternative high school education to districts in the county.

In La Grande, there are six elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. There is an elementary school in Island City, and kindergarten through 12th grade in each of the towns of Elgin, Imbler, North Powder, Cove and Union.

Eastern Oregon State College

Eastern Oregon State College, located in La Grande is a small college (2,000) students and offers personal attention with programs designed to fit the individuality of its students. The low student/faculty ratio allows for a variety of flexibility within the faculty/student relationship. Eastern was originally founded in 1929 as a teacher's college and has evolved into a multi-faceted regional institution. The 121-acre campus overlooks the city and blends both modern and traditional design with the natural surroundings.

There are 21 baccalaureate degrees offered at Eastern, a Master's of Teacher

Education program, an Associate of Science Degree, pre-professional degrees in dentistry, veterinary, medicine and law. In cooperation with other state insitutions, degrees programs offered through the Division of Regional Programs, include the BA/BS in Fire Service Administration with Western Oregon State College, a BS in nursing with Oregon Health Sciences University and an MS in School Administration with the University of Oregon.

The educational level in Union County is slightly higher than that of the tri-county area of Baker, Union and Wallowa due in part to existence of the hospital and college, institutions which normally require a higher percentage of educated people within their workforce. Even though the educational level is higher in Union County than its bordering counties, it still lags behind the state average with 22.6% of Union County's population receiving an advanced degree of some type compared by 27.6% for the state.

Percentage of Population with an Advanced Degree 1990	
Union County	22.6%
Tri-County Area	21.46%
Oregon	27.6%

*Source: 1990 Census

Eastern Oregon State College employs 210 full-time faculty members and 133 full-time staff personnel with an approximate annual payroll of \$11.5 million. Eastern also employs a significant number of students who are enrolled in the work-study program.

Telecommunications

Today's economy is undergoing a major shift. The economy for the United States is shifting from an industrial based economy to an information based economy. When the economy shifted from an agricultural based economy to an industrial based economy in previous years, severe upheaval occurred. This upheaval may occur again, and being prepared for the upcoming change will allow Union County

to look toward new economic opportunities. Telecommunications will play a significant part in the future of Union County and there are signs of demand for this new technology. Union County can be in a position to provide these new services.

Union County may become a part of the activities that will play a role in deciding the regulations placed on the new technology by becoming an involved partner. Looking forward to the fiber optics connection on I-84 is a possible first step. The advantages of this network will be costly and will involve upgrading band width.

The possibility of a televillage has been suggested for Union County. This is a building in the community that would house the latest telecommunications technology and would allow people access to the superhighway. These terminals could be rented to users. Since it may be impossible for the entire community to pay for access to the fiber optics system, funding partners must be identified.

It is obvious that Union County's economic base offers diversity to many employment sectors. By working together on upcoming issues that may affect our resources, and continued support into other areas of employment such as manufacturing, expanding into the future of telecommunications, Union County can continue to remain competitive in future markets.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS (SWOT) ANALYSIS

In order to perform a strategic planning process, a analysis needs to be performed of the area. This involves assessing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the community.

The Regional Strategies Board which represents Umatilla, Union and Wallowa performed in conjunction with its staff a SWOT analysis of each individual county. Rather than have another study repeated, the Union County Board of Commissioners chose to use the existing SWOT that was developed less than a year ago. The following pages summarizes the comments of the individuals that were interviewed in Union County. The Regional Strategies Board interviewed business people from the county, elected officials, city and county staff among others. These representations are only the voices of a few but give enough information and insight to complete the planning process.

STRENGTHS

The overwhelming majority of participants emphasized the quality of life as a strength as well as the physical beauty, fresh air and recreation opportunities of the county. It was apparent that the communities and county had pride in its regional medical center - Grande Ronde Hospital, and the fact that our rural community has a four-year degree institution in Eastern Oregon State College. Union County was recognized as a "hub" with downtown strength and a core of committed people. Transportation was noted as a strength with the location of I-84, the railroad running through the county as well as air service. These combined with the advanced technology that is now available makes Union County an area that provides an environmentally healthy climate and slower pace of life, yet can compete in the global marketplace.

Union County also provides strong cultural opportunities and a population with diverse views. It is considered to be an area offering rural living with urban amenities. There is growing economic strength and job opportunities with the family wage amounts increasing.

Main Points

- Quality of Life
- Physical beauty
- Stability of its economy
- A large capacity for growth
- Fresh air
- Crime free
- Recreation
- Medical Center
- EOSC
- Community Pride
- Small Population

WEAKNESSES

Although Union County is rich in strengths, it also has its share of weaknesses. The general consensus is that there is no cohesiveness and an inability of the various groups, agencies, business and socioeconomic sectors to join together in a shared progressive direction. There is a lack of organizations working together, networking, jointly planning and understanding the needs and goals of the various organizations. There is no unification, instead everyone has separate agendas. It seems that Union County is lacking involvement and volunteers and people seem to be re-active rather than pro-active. Other similar issues are State and Federal mandates.

As a whole, though, Union County respondents voiced concerns on the availability of housing which affects the whole county as well as the lack of support for youth. Geographic distance from major population centers could be seen as a weakness, but one that could be turned into a strength. Although Union County does not see high unemployment rates compared to the rest of the state or county, there still is a cry for good jobs (family wage level) which signifies a weakness. Since this area is noted as a "regional" area in terms of hospital, school, etc., lack of commuter air service & navigational aids at the airport need to be addressed.

Main Points

- Housing
- Unwillingness of focus on youth
- Isolation
- Lack of planning and understanding
- No unification
- Working together, networking
- Lack of jobs
- Navigational Aids at Airport
- Ballot Measure 5
- Commuter Service
- Local planning
- Federal/State mandates
- Too strong a focus on traditional industries
- Negative attitude towards growth

OPPORTUNITIES

Since Union County is considered a desirable location to live and work, the opportunities are limitless. Timber and wood products look grim for the future, primarily because of raw product supply, however, it appears that the government will be pumping more money into those depressed economies and the county should look to capitalize on this through retraining and ecosystem enhancement programs.

Manufacturing on the other hand could grow. La Grande is one of the largest draws of business and a huge attractor to new industry relocation in Union County. Agriculture will continue to be affected by State and Federal water and environmental policies, but should remain a viable and stable part of Union County's economy.

The majority of respondents mentioned diversification of the area economy as an opportunity. Inexpensive light and heavy industrial properties need to be developed as well as small companies, and companies offering low to medium technology. With the success of Grande Ronde Hospital and EOSC, it would be prudent to capitalize on their possible expansion.

Tourism can offer many opportunities to bring additional dollars into the local economy and should be focused on more heavily. There are many locations in Union County that could be of interest to travelers.

Main Points

- Desired location
- Manufacturing
- Diversification
- La Grande as a draw
- Industry relocation and recruitment
- Agriculture
- Home/cottage industry
- Entrepreneurialship
- Tourism development
- Light and heavy industrial land development

THREATS

Primarily, Federal and State policy related to timber supply, water, and the environment was considered a main threat. There were mentions of government leaders unwilling to be progressive and an inability to work together. There seems to be fragmented leadership with a lack of vision as well as a reluctance by local people with money to invest in the community. Other governmental concerns include the way revenue is generated, the inability to make responsible choices, and Measure 5 effects in 1995.

The possible loss of our economic base (dependent on natural resources) resulting in the lack of jobs is a concern addressed by all. Another issue that seems to be a trend not only in Union County but all over the tri-county region is the lack of affordable housing. In order to recruit better jobs and businesses to relocate, there needs to be a stable, affordable housing market. This parallels the problems with the schools and their survival. With the budget cuts and loss of funds, the schools are in trouble and there must be planning and a long term strategy to ensure a solid education for all.

Main Points

- Federal/State policy
- Leadership
- Job availability and timber
- Resource based industry
- Job shrinkage and land use restrictions
- Ballot Measure 5
- Lack of rural services such as water and sewer
- Limited funding
- Limited vision
- Schools
- Inconsistent public policy
- Lack of long term vision and strategy
- Existence of younger population

PRIORITIES AND ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The priorities of the residents of Union County were the same for all respondents in that the residents want job security, education, a strong economy and health care. The residents of Union County are concerned with maintaining a slow controlled growth. They want to keep a rural atmosphere and the elderly population prefer low crime rates and affordable services. It was suggested that industry, recreational facilities and tourism be developed.

As for priorities of the employers, they want a good community for their employees to live in that provides economic opportunities for all. A stable workforce, available resources, and the ability to be cost efficient are important to employers. Some mentioned housing once again, which is a concern for all but from an employer's standpoint, they are not able to hire quality employees if there is no place for them to live. The employer wants good quality education for their employees' children and training programs to prepare perspective employees for specific jobs.

It is time to break out of the shell and become a true leader and state-wide example for Eastern Oregon. The potential of Eastern Oregon State College is unlimited in providing a core for leadership.

To make a difference, there is a need for reorganization of the government which includes all parts such as the school districts, cemetery districts, etc. Union County needs to maintain the quality of life and look into planned growth and turn the prospect of growth from a negative into a positive outcome. The community needs to focus on EOSC and whether the college can grow and expand to support the future economy.

Suggestions included:

- Prioritize the spending of public funds
- Less overhead - more output
- Provide leadership at the county level that will unite various agencies/committees and facilitate the coordination of their activities to the general welfare of the county

Community Highlights

Each of the eight communities in the county were approached and asked what their specific goals and strategies in the coming years were. The following pages includes the community comments and history and desired goals and strategies.

CITY OF COVE

Cove, with a population of 545, is a beautiful community settled at the base of 7,132 foot Mount Fanny. This area is noted for its cherry orchards, one of the major crops in Union County.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

CITY OF ELGIN

The community of Elgin sits tucked into the edge of the Wallowa Mountains in the northeast corner of Oregon. Located on the banks of the Grande Ronde River, Elgin is surrounded by rugged splendor. Elgin's image as a "tough logging community" has been built upon years of logging activity in the nearby Wallowa Whitman National Forest and its reliance on the wood products industry. Agriculture has also been a mainstay of the region's economy, with the surrounding ranches and farms producing cattle, grain, grass seed and some orchard activity. Decreases in timber harvests, resulting in cutbacks at local mills, the erosion of cattle and wheat prices have impacted a "boom or bust" economic cycle for the community.

Year round recreational opportunities abound: hunting, fishing, skiing and white water rafting. These recreational activities have begun to attract new residents, especially retirees from the state of Washington and California. Its historic Opera House, nearby Spout Springs ski area and the Grande Ronde River are just a few of the attractions that draw visitors to this rural community.

Meeting the needs of the visitor industry is one economic opportunity available to the community, improves its retail district and offers more amenities to visitors. Plans are underway to use volunteers to create a park along the Grande Ronde River to provide camping and river access to rafters. From La Grande, Elgin is the most direct route to the Wallowa Mountains and Wallowa Lake. As the tourism industry continues to grow in neighboring Wallowa County, opportunities exist to capture pass-through traffic.

Although downturns in the timber industry have impacted the economy of Elgin, Boise Cascade Corporation continues to operate a stud mill and plywood plant in town which provides over 250 jobs. Without any organized effort, Elgin has benefitted in recent years from the start-up and expansion of a number of small local entrepreneurial operations. Furniture makes, a pottery shop, a log home kit manufacturer and a saddle and harness company are just a few of the small businesses that have developed operations in Elgin. Affordable buildings and building sites, a bootstrap approach to financing and the area's small town atmosphere have made the community attractive to refugees from large urban areas seeking to establish a small business.

Despite the economic adversity of the 1980's, Elgin has consistently supported its local schools. Approximately 35% of its high school graduates go on to four-year colleges and a number of others attend community colleges. Housing and land acreage are relatively inexpensive. Most of the housing available in town is \$50,000 or less. While a number of the streets are unpaved and its downtown core lacks a cohesive image, clean-up efforts are underway. A downtown "pocket park" is under construction and an historic water fountain has been moved to the site.

Striking a balance between timber and tourism, growth and resistance to change, is a challenge faced by many rural communities, and Elgin is no exception. All signs are that pass-through tourism, recreational visitors and retirement activities are going to increase. How to tap these new potentials without destroying the small town atmosphere that makes Elgin special to residents and visitors represents a significant challenge to the small community.

The community of Elgin will need to freshen its image in order to build on its position as the gateway to the Wallowa's and capture the increasing tourism market. Through improvements to its downtown core, Elgin can capitalize on its small town atmosphere and build a community that is attractive to residents and visitors alike. Many of Elgin's existing qualities - low housing prices, its commitment to schools, emerging cottage industries and outstanding recreational opportunities have already attracted new residents and offer the potential of attracting new businesses as well. (Information provided by the *City of Elgin - From Vision to Action - Strategic Goals for Economic Development*).

GOALS & STRATEGIES

By the year 2000, create a net gain of 100 new family wage jobs through expansion, recruitment and development of businesses.

- Initiate design and merchandizing improvements to Elgin's business district to better meet the needs of local residents and to capture an increasing share of the expanding tourism trade in the region
- Promote and encourage the growth and development of existing businesses in Elgin
- Initiate a business recruitment program
- Develop recreational and interpretive facilities at Hunaha Park on the Grande Ronde River in Elgin

Improve the livability of Elgin and ensure that all residents have affordable quality housing and access to effective social service programs.

- Complete the development of a central park and pocket parks
- Initiate a campaign to broaden and strengthen leadership and citizen involvement in community issues
- Develop and initiate a five to ten year housing plan to meet Elgin's needs for low-income, moderately-priced single family, and upscale housing
- Design and implement a social service network to provide assistance to residents of Elgin
- Support and encourage the weekly newspaper as a means to keep citizens informed of community issues and activities

By the year 2000, have a support system in place to encourage and enable Elgin residents to access information, education and training required for existing and new employment and business opportunities.

- Collaborate with the Division of Continuing Education at Eastern Oregon State College to design and establish training programs to prepare the existing workforce for new employment and business opportunities.
- Work with the school district and EOSC to expand Elgin's use of EDNET to deliver information and educational programs to students and adults

Enhance and develop the community's transportation and telecommunications infrastructure to meet the present and future needs of residents and businesses.

- Develop a bypass for trucks traveling from Highway 204 to Highway 82
- Establish a special improvement district to finance chip sealing and maintenance of all city streets
- Assist in establishing and participate in a regional task force to promote improvement of strategic highways in northeastern Oregon
- Assess adequacy of Elgin's telecommunications infrastructure and initiate strategy to upgrade to competitive standards

CITY OF IMBLER

Imbler, with a population of 300 is known as the "grass seed capital of the world." The high quality and large production of grass seed makes possible for marketing throughout the world. The Imbler area, located between La Grande and Elgin, is a beautiful pastoral area.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

CITY OF ISLAND CITY

The Grande Ronde River once flowed on both sides of Island City, creating an island eight miles long and half a mile wide. Today, however, the river is controlled and flows along one side leaving only the name Island City, as a reminder of its past. Island City's population is 850.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

CITY OF LA GRANDE

As the traditional commercial center of Union, Wallowa and Baker Counties, La Grande has a history of economic success. La Grande is the county seat for Union County and the hub of Union County and of Northeastern Oregon.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

CITY OF NORTH POWDER

North Powder, population 460 has the unique distinction of having the only post office on the Oregon Trail. Located close to Anthony Lakes, Thief Valley Reservoir as well as Wolf Creek Reservoir and Pilcher Creek Reservoir puts the community in a wonderful location for recreation.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

CITY OF SUMMERVILLE

Summerville has a population of 145 and originally was a stagecoach stop for Oregon Trail travelers. It is a scenic area where deer and other wildlife thrive.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

CITY OF UNION

Prior to the 1950's, the people of Union invested a lot of money in their town. Today one finds ample evidence of a wealthy past exemplified by great old houses, a main street lined with two story brick buildings, a fine old hotel and attractively laid out tree lined streets. One has the feeling that before the 50's, Union was a community of great pride and prosperity.

During the 1950's, the economy of Union was still diversified and healthy. Wealth was created through such enterprises as: lumber mills, flour mills, cattle and sheep industry, orchards, fruit packing houses, dairies, a creamery, and general agriculture. Downtown had all the retail and service needs a resident of Union required and trips to La Grande were limited.

In the 1960's, changes began to appear in the economy. The flour mill and creamery closed, the sheep industry went into decline, two of the lumber mills operated for a short time before closing and farms began to consolidate. Orchards and agriculture were still an important part in the economy. A major change was the construction of the highway causing traffic to by-pass Union. Downtown was still a viable place to shop and obtain services, but signs of change were everywhere.

During the 1970's, the shops were still full, however economic decline persisted. The population of approximately 2,000 started to decrease, the fruit industry was in decline, the theater closed, and only lumber mill remained operating.

The 1980's saw continued economic decline and the first significant loss in local services. The last mill closed, the bank closed, and the doctor and dentist left town. La Grande became the shopping center for the residents of Union and downtown buildings started to become vacant.

The 80's also were a time of some positive changes for Union. Tourism started to increase in the region, retirees and new families moved into the area, due in part to affordable housing. New families added to the school population and vacant houses were hard to find. Union continued to rely on La Grande for jobs and shopping. However, opportunities for growth and development existed in Union due to excess public infrastructure capacity and undeveloped land inside the urban growth boundary.

The 80's seemed to make the bottom of economic decline and the 1990's appear to be the era of new economic opportunities. The City of Union's location in the rugged northeast corner of Oregon is both an asset and a liability. The surrounding national forests and productive farm lands have given the community a high quality of life and provided economic opportunities in the areas of agriculture, timber and tourism, but its relative isolation makes attracting new businesses and residents difficult. While opportunities for development exist within Union and the surrounding communities, the lack of a cohesive development strategy has kept the region from moving forward. (Information provided by the *City of Union - Strategic Goals for Economic Development*).

GOALS & STRATEGIES

Create 100 family wage jobs by the year 2000 in the areas of light manufacturing, tourism, social services and home based businesses.

- Create and fund a business assistance team to work on retention and expansion of existing businesses, and recruitment of new businesses to the community
- Prepare commercial/industrial land for development

By the year 2000, have in place the infrastructure capacity in the City of Union to serve 3,000 residents.

- Rebuild the waste water treatment plant to eliminate discharge into Catherine Creek to meet environmental standards
- Develop and implement a multi-year program to surface all residential streets and replace two bridges by the year 2000

By the year 2000, have in place state-of-the-art telecommunications technology for the 21st century.

- Tie the library catalog to the regional library on-line catalog
- Work in conjunction with the school, develop an EDNET site and public use of electronic reference resources
- Expand local cable access capacity and better utilize the resource as a tool for community involvement

Develop on an ongoing basis the necessary programs and public notices to

encourage the development of sufficient housing units to meet the needs of the desired population of 3,000 in the City of Union.

- Develop by 1995 a comprehensive housing plan for the City of Union that outlines development opportunities, a community profile and other information that will encourage the development of new units
- Pursue funding alternatives that will assist residents with the rehabilitation of the existing residential units

By the year 1996, establish a health care facility that will also house the social service support programs for the residents of Union.

- Establish an advocacy group to develop a comprehensive proposal demonstrating the need for social service programs and a support facility in the City of Union
- Work with the Oregon Health Sciences University Nursing School to expand the planned City of Union health clinic to include funding for a proposed social services facility
- Establish a medical scholarship fund for local students with the recruitment of local community collaborators in the project

Develop facilities to enhance the recreation amenities in the City of Union by the year 2000.

- Expand upon the commercial and community success of the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show
- Develop a recreation facility for the residents of Union
- Undertake a feasibility study to determine the viability of developing a public golf course in the City of Union

Triple the local user visits to the library and museum by the year 2000.

- Link strategies under telecommunications in public infrastructure for improvements in services at the library
- Develop a promotion plan for the museum

By 1995, establish programs to ensure that Union's existing and future workforce is provided year-around adult education programs utilizing existing facilities and school.

- Conduct a community wide survey to determine appropriate education needs
- Develop the components of an adult education program

By 1996, ensure that essential programs are in place for a complete and diversified education for high school students in the City of Union.

- Create a school curriculum that prepares students for the competitive job requirements of the 21st century

By 1997, develop a sustainable resource fund to support education programs in the City of Union.

- Investigate alternative funding sources that can be dedicated to support education programs using such ideas as user fees, development of a trust fund, and establishment of an education district

